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Do Translation Professionals Need to Tolerate Ambiguity to be Successful? A Study of the Links between Tolerance of Ambiguity, Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction

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Do Translation Professionals Need to Tolerate Ambiguity to be Successful?
A Study of the Links between Tolerance of Ambiguity, Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction

Being a successful translator can often mean perceiving ambiguous situations as desirable. In this chapter, I report on a study of 85 professional translators which was carried out to examine the relationships between Tolerance of Ambiguity (TA), trait Emotional Intelligence (EI) and job satisfaction. Participants were surveyed with trait EI and TA measures adapted to cross-cultural contexts. The analysis revealed that translators' TA scores are positively and significantly linked to their trait EI scores and, more specifically, to the factor of self-control. TA, however, was not significantly correlated to job satisfaction. This is the first study to examine empirically TA in the translation profession on such a large scale. The chapter concludes with training recommendations.

Keywords: professional translators; tolerance of ambiguity; emotional intelligence; job satisfaction; self-control.

“Life is a mixture of unsolved problems, ambiguous victories and vague defeats - with very few moments of clear peace . . .”

—Hugh Prather (in Katsaros and Nicolaidis 2012)

Introduction

Many studies investigating the translation process do so by observing specific instances of translator behaviour. It has been argued, however, that trait-level characteristics are much more consistent than individual instances of behaviour (Layton and Muraven 2014, 52). As such, investigating translators’ traits and individual differences in order to understand their decision-making may be equally revealing in terms of predicting how the translation process is shaped. Although there is still relatively little research which has been carried out on the effects of personality traits on translators and their work, there is growing acknowledgment of the need to describe the profile of participants in translation process research and to draw inferences between individual traits and translation competences (Muñoz Martín 2010; Jääskeläinen 2012; Saldanha and O’Brien 2013).

One personality trait which has garnered some attention in the translation studies literature is an individual’s tolerance of ambiguity or uncertainty (e.g. Tirkkonen-Condit 2000; Angelone 2010; Michael et al. 2011). Due to its very nature as a cognitive task, translating involves ambiguity and choosing between alternative solutions. Translators are continuously faced with having to make difficult translation decisions and, more often than not, there is no one right answer but many possible alternative solutions to the translation of a ST segment. Benjamin (2012, 40) acknowledged this tricky aspect of a translator’s work: “Precisely because the meaning of the original formulation, the one to be translated, is not

singular, translation begins with the ‘ambiguous’”. Due to its potential impact on cognitive problem-solving in translation, it makes sense for researchers to investigate the trait of ambiguity tolerance.

In addition, personality traits such as tolerance of ambiguity and emotional intelligence are said to be positively related to performance in cross-cultural settings (Herman et al. 2010; Tang, Yin and Nelson 2010). This is relevant because, if they are to succeed in the profession, it is highly likely that translators working in cross-cultural settings will have to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable, or at least non-threatening, and react well to unfamiliar and complex stimuli. They will need to be comfortable, in control, and at ease when faced with a wide range of issues. As such, it is interesting to investigate the relationship between professional translators’ work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, and their ability to cope with change, uncertainty, and conflicting perspectives.

Personality traits are commonly systematized in hierarchical models, whereby some traits are considered as higher order or general traits (e.g. neuroticism, openness to experience) which comprise a number of lower-order personality traits that describe more specific dimensions (e.g. self-esteem, sociability). Both tolerance of ambiguity (TA) and trait emotional intelligence (EI) are considered lower-order personality traits. Because individuals can have positive affective reactions toward ambiguity, the TA trait is related to the higher order trait of openness to experience (Lauriola et al. 2015) while trait EI is defined as a constellation of emotional perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies, and is strongly associated with the general traits of neuroticism and extraversion (Petrides, Pita and Kokkinaki 2007). As Petrides, Siegling and Saklofske (2016) explain, conceptually, trait EI integrates the affective aspects of personality scattered across the Big Five factors: “trait EI explicitly refers to a comprehensive conceptualization of the affective variance in the realm of personality [...] it is a distinct (because it can be isolated in personality space) and

compound (because it is correlated with several personality dimensions) construct.” (2016, 205/213) Research demonstrated the significance of both TA and EI with respect to individuals’ performance and satisfaction with their jobs in a wide range of occupations (Kafetsios and Zampetakis 2008; Katsaros and Nicolaidis 2012; Xu and Tracey 2014). The present study therefore explores the notion that being tolerant of ambiguity and emotionally intelligent can have a positive influence on a translator’s work, as such a finding could indicate the need for a significant change to the way that translation teaching, learning, and professional development is carried out.

This chapter investigates the tolerance of ambiguity trait of 85 professional translators, and examines the links between TA, trait EI and self-perceived job satisfaction. First, relevant research in translation studies is reviewed. Second, the TA concept and some recent applications are discussed, including its relationship with work performance and emotional intelligence. Finally, the data gathered for this study is analysed and discussed, and the chapter concludes with some recommendations for training and further research.

Translation research on ambiguity tolerance

Research on ambiguity in translation can be broadly split into four categories, though there is admittedly some level of overlap between these. First, most early works - as well as several recent studies - have focused on the ambiguities that a particular source text may contain and the challenges that this presents for the translator. One such example is Jolicoeur’s (2000) discussion of the structural and immediate ambiguities present in the work of Juan Carlos Onetti, and the ensuing issues for the translator. More recently, Pujol’s 2006 study of several romance-language translations of Eugenides’s novel *Middlesex* demonstrates how the

narrator's purposeful use of the gender-neutral and ambiguous 'I' in English becomes problematic for the translators. These studies are mainly concerned with ambiguities inscribed in source texts.

Second, several authors have theorized about the problems of ambiguity in translation in more general terms. Such is the case for Spilka (1981), for example, who sets out to warn the translator about several potential areas of ambiguity that can be found in common linguistic or lexical structures. Landheer (1989) and Delabastita (2001) also discuss various textual aspects that might be a source of interlingual ambiguity, and Fougner Rydning (1998) highlights the importance for trainers and researchers of evaluating the strategies used by translators when translating intentionally ambiguous ST content. These theoretical works are extremely valuable, as they have served to raise awareness of a number of didactic (and other) aspects linked to the translation of ambiguous material.¹

The third category of research tackling ambiguity in translation is concerned with how the translator processes ambiguity during problem-solving. For the last 20 years or so, an increasing number of TS scholars (e.g. Danks et al. 1997; O'Brien 2011; Ferreira and Schwieter 2015) have turned to cognitive psychology in order to investigate the translation process, translators' skills, and their use of particular strategies. This heightened interest in cognitive processes led to the design of studies focusing on translators' decision-making behaviours, and scholars have unearthed new information as regards the ways in which translators handle ambiguity during the translation process. For example, Fraser (1996, 2000) determined that professional translators generally had more tolerance for ambiguity and

¹ It must be noted here that there is another 'category' of writing that straddles the first two. Indeed, several literary translators have also discussed how they dealt with ambiguity, drawing from personal translating experiences, but with the aim of providing some general principles or advice for other (literary) translators. Luigi Gussago (2013, 76), for example, advises translators to transfer the uncertainty of the ST, and to not render it too precisely for fear of spoiling the original. These essays are additional evidence that tolerating ambiguity is a key concern for professional translators.

uncertainty than learners who are often unwilling to live with temporary uncertainty, and that high ambiguity-tolerant personalities deal with complex situations by keeping their options open, whereas low-ambiguity-tolerant personalities do so by reducing potential distractions. The results of Tirkkonen-Condit's (2000) experiments analysing high-quality professional performance demonstrate that uncertainty can be linked to all kinds of processing phenomena, and that translators learn to manage uncertainty as part of their translation strategy. She argues that successful translators show a capacity for keeping final solutions in suspense, and that TA is a personality feature worthy of attention in translator training (2000, 141). Tirkkonen-Condit's study is perhaps the first to provide some empirical support for the claim that translating is riddled with potential ambiguity.

Due to the increasing interest over the last decade in how best to develop expertise in translation, process studies have continued to focus on the differences between student and professional translators in terms of their tolerance of ambiguity. Künzli (2004) investigated students' and professionals' reactions to an ambiguous source text (ST) passage, and found that while students are just as good at detecting the ambiguity of the ST passage as the professionals, they respond to it very differently: risk-taking for students (making educated guesses), and caution for professional translators (checking with the client). Künzli concludes that spending time disambiguating the ST is important for successful translation performance. More recently, Angelone (2010) and Shreve and Angelone (2011) used think-aloud and screen recording methods to explore the concept of uncertainty management (i.e. the application of conscious strategies for reducing uncertainty so as to successfully translate) during problem solving. Their experiments with one professional and three students highlighted the role of expertise in the management of translation uncertainty, and the positive link with translation quality. Another interesting finding from the research was that the professional not only exhibited greater tolerance for uncertainty than the students, but that

s/he was more likely to self-monitor, defined as “the ability to reflect on, plan for, and exercise deliberate and strategic control over the progress of a problem solving sequence” (Angelone 2010, 19). The role of monitoring when managing ambiguity is particularly interesting and will be returned to in a subsequent section.

A fourth related trend of research in translation has focused on the ambiguous *situations* that translators can find themselves in, such as ones where ethical and ideological considerations come into play. For example, Jones (2004) discussed the socioethical dilemmas and decisions he faced while translating Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian literature into English during the 1990s. Viewing translation as both a textual and an extra-textual action, Jones highlights that the translator can struggle to take account of the interests and wishes of all of the different parties involved, and that translation decisions do not always prevent a “sense of inner conflict” (2004, 721). It has sometimes been argued that, in order to tolerate ambiguous situations of this type, translators “need to create such an attitude toward their work so that they can tolerate the given conditions, retain their self-respect, and find their role somehow meaningful” (Alasuutari in Abdallah 2010, 30). The TA trait encompasses an individual’s attitude to ambiguous situations such as these, the implication being that reacting aversively to situational ambiguity leads to impaired decision-making (Furnham and Marks 2013, 718).

Many different terms have been employed in the TS literature to describe both textual and extra-textual situations of ambiguity encountered by translators. Some are related to the TA trait, such as the concept of risk-aversion (e.g. Pym 2005). According to Pym (2005) “risk” in translation is the probability of an undesired outcome in a communication situation, such as the risk of not getting paid, or of losing a client. There is risk involved in solving specific translation problems too, with some problems involving low risks (limited possibility of an undesired outcome) and others involving greater risks. Pym (2005, 41) argues that using

explicitation as a translation strategy, for example, can be a way of handling a translation problem so as to minimize the risk of an undesired interpretation: “This hypothetical risk-aversion would then be our general explanation for explicitation (and for quite a few other behavioral patterns as well)”. Pym views risk-taking and risk-aversion as normal consequences of the kinds of situations in which translators work. The dispositional trait of risk-taking is clearly related to the TA trait, but the psychological literature highlights a subtle difference between the two: ambiguous decision-making is defined as a situation in which there is an unknown distribution of outcome probabilities for at least one of the options, whereas risky decision-making involves knowledge of probabilities but not of outcomes (Furnham and Marks 2013, 718). In other words, risk-taking involves a more precise knowledge of outcomes and probabilities than TA. The present study focuses on the TA trait, due to its more comprehensive interest in translators’ tolerance of ambiguity. A fuller definition of TA and how it is captured in measurement will be provided in the next sections.

This brief literature review served to bring the reader up to date as regards the state of play in translation studies on the topic of ambiguity tolerance. Although translation scholars have demonstrated that ambiguity tolerance seems important for translation performance, no studies have yet examined empirically the TA of a large number of professional translators with the use of psychometrics. The present study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Tolerating ambiguity: the psychological trait

Definition

In the psychological literature, tolerance of ambiguity (TA) is an individual difference factor which reflects the way in which an individual tends to perceive and handle ambiguous situations or stimuli (Furnham 1994). Individuals tolerant of ambiguity will perceive ambiguity positively and feel less anxious or discouraged in ambiguous situations than individuals at the other end of the scale who will be less likely to engage with ambiguous information, be more sensitive to stress, more risk averse, and more sensitive to particular kinds of feedback (Budner 1962; Furnham and Ribchester 1995; Dewaele 2012).

Despite the fact that the concepts have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature, (in)tolerance of uncertainty and (in)tolerance of ambiguity are viewed differently in social psychology. Grenier, Barrette and Ladouceur (2005, 596) acknowledge that there are overlapping similarities between these concepts, but argue that there is “a time-oriented distinction between individuals who are unable to tolerate a *present* ambiguous situation and individuals who interpret the *future* as a source of discomfort” [my emphasis]. As such, (in)tolerance of uncertainty has been mostly used in research on anxiety disorders which often involve the interpretation of a future event (op cit). When reviewing studies on ambiguity tolerance in the rest of this chapter, the focus will be on the TA concept, i.e. the interpretation of ambiguous stimuli in the “here and now”, as this is deemed to be more likely to impact individuals’ decision-making and problem-solving when translating.

The TA concept has been used in several applied fields, such as clinical psychology and organisational behaviour, as it is viewed as a measure of adaptation and healthy functioning (Furnham and Marks 2013). Recently, the TA research literature appears to have increasingly focused on how TA influences the perception of situations and decision making, and its effects in the work environment. Specifically, there are two areas in which TA has received increasing attention, and which are of interest to the translation studies community: cross-cultural work environments and language learning.

Applications in the workplace

The organizational psychology literature suggests that tolerance of ambiguity plays an important role in behaviour at work. In several articles focusing on a number of different professions (banking, IT, tourism, the public sector), Nicolaidis and Katsaros examined the links between TA and individual performance at work, as indicated by job satisfaction and other variables (cf. Katsaros and Nicolaidis 2012; Katsaros, Tsirikas and Nicolaidis 2014; Katsaros et al. 2014). They argue that positive emotions in the workplace increase people's levels of ambiguity tolerance and that job satisfaction - defined as a positive emotional state resulting from the pleasure an employee derives from their job - constitutes a "significantly affecting factor of ambiguity tolerance" (Nicolaidis and Katsaros 2011, 48). In fact, they suggest that emotional attitudes, such as TA and EI, impact on individuals' flexibility, productivity, adaptability, acceptance of change, and performance in new and complex learning situations.

In particular, research on TA has demonstrated that ambiguity tolerance is related to decision making quality in conditions of ambiguity (Xu and Tracey 2014), and that having a high tolerance for ambiguity is important for successful leadership and successful cross-cultural endeavours (Lee, Gettman and Swanson 2013). The fact that TA has been found to influence behaviour in cross-cultural settings is highly significant for translators, particularly if one considers that a growing body of research conceptually links TA to cross-cultural phenomena, including cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural competence (Herman et al. 2010, 59). For example, a study seeking ways to develop army leaders' performance in - and adaptation to - various cultural contexts associates traits such as ambiguity tolerance with adjustment and performance in intercultural settings (Abbe et al. 2007). Cross-cultural

communication and competence are key skills for translators, and core elements of their work (e.g. Schäffner 2004). It is likely that translators working in cross-cultural settings will perform well if they value diversity, are able to handle change and unexpected situations and, not least, if they are able to understand that there is more than one way to interpret meaning. It is noteworthy that the European Masters in Translation (EMT) Expert Group includes ‘openness to innovation’ and ‘readiness to adapt to new conditions in multilingual situations’ in their list of translation-specific cultural and interpersonal competences (2009, 5-6). Given the evidence for the importance of ambiguity tolerance with respect to decision making in cross-cultural environments, and the abovementioned association of ambiguity tolerance with positive emotions in the workplace, it is plausible to suggest that ambiguity tolerance would be associated with a translator’s job satisfaction.

Language learning and emotional skills

Interestingly, tolerating ambiguity has also been associated with learning languages and with being emotionally competent. Multilingualism research indicates that a high level of multilingualism and multiculturalism makes people more tolerant of ambiguity (Dewaele and Wei 2013). According to Edwards and Perez Cavana (2012), language learning always implies ambiguity, in particular for real communicative use, and language learners with low TA can find it very challenging to cope with this ambiguity, sometimes developing negative feelings towards the language or learning experience as a result. It seems that (positively) engaging with languages can have an effect on some personality traits and, in particular, help to develop an individual’s ambiguity tolerance.

Yan and Wang (2012, 171) argue that translation and second language instructional settings share common features, especially as they suggest that second language learning

plays an important part in professional translator training. Therefore, the impact of TA on language learning and engagement is likely to also affect translation. In their research on multilinguals, Dewaele and Wei (2013) found that participants knowing more languages scored significantly higher than those knowing fewer languages on the TA scale, that those who have lived abroad also scored significantly higher on TA, and that a higher level of global proficiency in various languages was linked with higher TA scores. A recent study carried out by Thompson and Khawaja (2015) in the Turkish foreign language classroom context also found that adult multilingual EFL learners had a lower fear of ambiguity than adult bilingual EFL learners.² The idea that language proficiency goes hand in hand with tolerance of ambiguity is particularly relevant for translators who will have at least partial mastery in a number of languages.

In addition, it is noteworthy that writing anxiety (the degree of stress or anxiety experienced when writing) has been found to impact negatively on translation performance, though ambiguity tolerance is a broader concept extending beyond foreign language anxiety.³ In their study of the links between second language writing anxiety and the development of translation skills, Yan and Wang (2012) found that writing anxiety is significantly negatively correlated with translation performance amongst Chinese-to-English students, and that language anxiety affects translation learning. The authors suggest that gradually reducing translation learning anxiety could stimulate students' desire to improve their translation skills

² The study employed two major categorizations of multilingualism: for the first categorization, participants completed a comprehensive background questionnaire stating previous languages studied and self-rated proficiency. The second categorization was based on the PPLI operationalisation of multilingualism, whereby participants report on their perceived positive language interaction between the foreign languages they learned.

³ Dewaele and Ip (2013, 48) have argued that those who can handle ambiguity in a foreign language might also be less anxious in the foreign language classroom, and that there is a high correlation between both constructs.

(2012, 186). More research is therefore required to better understand if and how TA can affect translation learning.

One area that is consistently linked with both efficient language learning experiences and high levels of TA is emotional intelligence. MacIntyre and Dewaele (2014) found that multilingualism was linked to foreign language enjoyment, and that this heightened enjoyment decreases anxiety. According to these authors: “positive emotion can help dissipate the lingering effects of negative emotional arousal, helping to promote personal resiliency in the face of difficulties” (MacIntyre and Dewaele 2014, 242). As such, it could be speculated that positive feelings and enjoying a translation task may help a translator to withstand difficulties, such as those linked to ambiguity, and successfully resolve translation problems.

George and Jones (2001) argue that emotions impact on information processing and decision-making in different contexts. Interestingly, they suggest that people who are high in emotional intelligence may be more attuned to discrepancies in their working contexts. As discrepancies are a source of ambiguity, it could be argued that individuals with high EI will better respond to ambiguity, in situations of language use as well as in other situations. In fact, as early as 1949 Frenkel-Brunswik argued that tolerance of ambiguity is an emotional personality variable, and Nicolaidis and Katsaros (2011) underscore the strong consensus in the literature that emotionally competent people are more adaptable in ambiguous situations.

Research has identified strong evidence of positive relations between ambiguity tolerance, emotions and job satisfaction (Katsaros and Nicolaidis 2012), but the links between TA and EI specifically have rarely been explored. To my knowledge, the only piece of research that attempts to do so is Jain, Srivastava and Sullivan’s (2013) study of the emotional intelligence, ambiguity tolerance and leadership effectiveness of managers in India. The authors found that EI enhances the leadership effectiveness of managers high in

TA. Their results indicate that individuals high in TA are comfortable making complex and ambiguous decisions, but they are even more effective when they can also successfully interpret and use their understanding of their own and other peoples' emotions. It is therefore plausible to suggest that high levels of emotional intelligence should positively influence translators' management of ambiguous situations in their work and, thus, that EI should be positively associated with job satisfaction.

Taking the above points into consideration, I propose the following hypotheses:

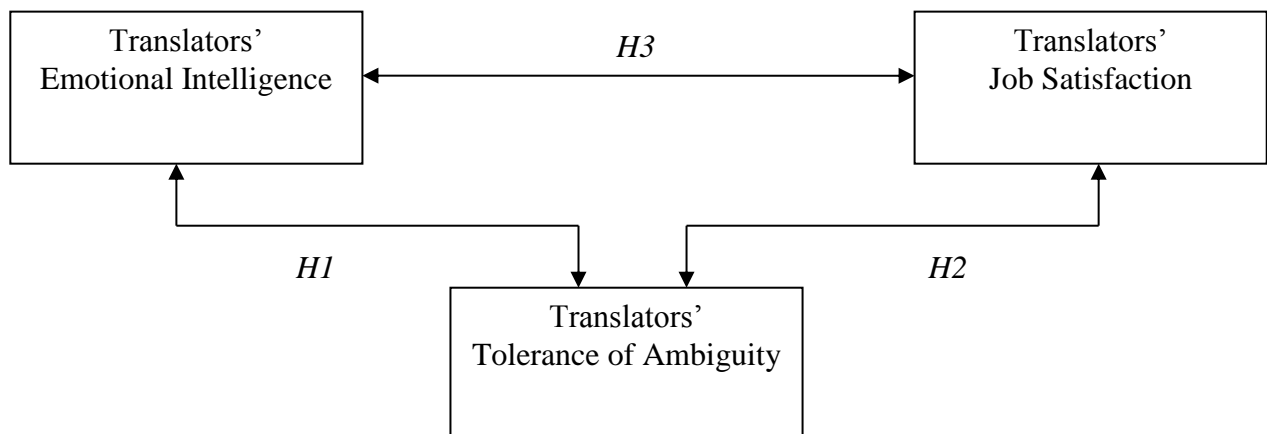
Hypothesis 1: Professional translators' tolerance of ambiguity is positively linked to their emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis 2: Professional translators with high ambiguity tolerance feel greater job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Professional translators with high emotional intelligence feel greater job satisfaction.

Please refer to Figure 1 for an illustration of the study's hypotheses.

Figure 1. Study Hypotheses



The study

Procedure

Participants in the present study had initially been contacted in 2013 to take part in a study on translators' emotional intelligence, the results of which can be found in Hubscher-Davidson (2016). As such, the EI scores and demographic variables discussed in the present study were drawn from that database. Participants were contacted again in 2014 and asked to fill in the TA scale. Ethics approval for the study was received from Aston University Research Ethics Committee, and approximately 55% of the initial pool of professional translators responded to this new survey. All surveys and communications were carried out online. Other studies have shown that online versions of traditional questionnaires do not compromise their psychometric properties, and that a benefit of internet-based research is that it reduces social desirability and dishonesty (e.g. Dewaele and Wei, 2014).

Participants

The sample used in this study comprised 85 professional translators, with 62 women and 23 men (mean age = 49 years, age range = 25-88 years). Participants had initially been contacted through professional translation associations world-wide, including: Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI), British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT), Society of Authors' Translators Association (TA), Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires (CEATL), German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ), Association for Professional Translators and Interpreters in Catalunya (APTIC), Spanish Association of Translators, Copy-editors and Interpreters (ASETRAD), American Literary Translators

Association (ALTA) and American Translators Association (ATA). This list does not include possible re-postings by participants on other websites or blogs. Approximately 75% of participants in this study indicated that their occupational status was self-employed, and 73% specified that their mother-tongue was English.

As a result of the purposive sampling method employed, there is a higher proportion of self-employed, English mother-tongue, and women translators in this study. This over-representation means that the sample is not homogenous, and the results of the research cannot be generalized to the entire population of professional translators. Nevertheless, such a breadth of responses contributes to increasing ecological validity and makes the study one of the largest international surveys of professional translators carried out. Ideally, this study should be replicated in other settings and with other translators. It is also of note that the data did not highlight a difference in the psychological features of the abovementioned subgroups.⁴

Instruments

Similarly to Bontempo et al.'s 2014 study of sign language interpreters' personality features, an online questionnaire was created using the survey tool Survey Monkey, and included a number of questions to collect demographic data, linguistic data, certification and training information.

In addition to this background questionnaire, participants completed two psychometric scales. The TA scale employed in this study was originally designed by Herman et al. (2010), as a result of the measurement challenges that had previously plagued research on TA. The

⁴ The independent samples t-tests for equality of means carried out found no significant differences as regards the variables of (1) gender, (2) employment status, or (3) mother-tongue, for either TA (1: $t_{(85)} = -.13, p = .90$; 2: $t_{(85)} = -.51, p = .61$; 3: $t_{(85)} = -.15, p = .88$) or global trait EI (1: $t_{(85)} = -.87, p = .39$; 2: $t_{(85)} = -.77, p = .44$; 3: $t_{(85)} = .11, p = .91$).

authors developed the Tolerance for Ambiguity Scale (TAS), a measure of TA which they described as conceptually clear, psychometrically sound, internally consistent, and adapted to cross-cultural contexts (2010, 60). According to Furnham and Marks (2013, 725), Herman et al.'s measure of TA is contextualised, or context-dependent, which leads to a better understanding of its link to cross-cultural phenomena. After testing the scale with multilinguals, Dewaele and Wei (2013) made some further adaptations to it. The 11 items of the TAS are rated on a 5 point Likert scale (see Appendix 1), and the distinct dimensions of the scale, which are in line with the definition of ambiguity provided in the previous section, are: (1) valuing diverse others, (2) coping with change, (3) challenging perspectives, and (4) unfamiliarity (2013, 234). The test operationalizes TA by using contextualized items reflecting ambiguous stimuli commonly experienced in cross-cultural situations. 'Valuing diverse others' relates to the interpersonal nature of cross-cultural settings; 'coping with change' reflects the dynamic nature of intercultural situations; 'unfamiliarity' relates to the developmental benefits of being in unfamiliar situations; and 'challenging perspectives' deals with managing seemingly irreconcilable realities which are central to the ambiguity encountered in cross-cultural experiences (Herman et al. 2010, 62-63). A Cronbach alpha analysis revealed modest but sufficient internal consistency reliability: 0.68.⁵ The scale is considered "a useful tool for measuring TA in cross-cultural contexts and it may revolutionise the measurement of TA, starting a trend in the development of context-specific measures" (Furnham and Marks 2013, 725).

Trait EI was measured using the TEIQue (Petrides 2009), a psychometrically robust instrument (Mikolajczak et al. 2007) which contains 153 items, covering 15 emotion-related facets and 4 factors. The 15 facets map onto the trait EI sampling domain, and each test item

⁵ Although an alpha above .7 is usually regarded as acceptable, it should be noted that the value of alpha is partially dependent on the number of items in the scale and that Dewaele and Wei's study which also employed this TA scale reported an alpha of .64 which they considered to be sufficient (2013, 234).

belongs to a single facet (e.g. emotion regulation). Facets are narrower than factors (e.g. self control) which, in turn, are narrower than global trait EI. A full list of factors and facets can be found in Appendix 2. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’. Sample items include “I get stressed by situations that others find comfortable” and “Generally, I’m able to adapt to new environments”. A global score was computed, with higher scores representing higher levels of trait EI. There are 22 language versions of the TEIQue and non-English versions were made available upon request. The internal consistency (alpha) for overall trait EI in this study was found to be very high at .96

Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS. Data on self-perceptions of job satisfaction was drawn from participants’ answers to the following question: “How happy in your job are you?” Respondents were asked to select an option on a Likert scale offering 7 choices (from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied) in order to rate their perceived job satisfaction as a translator.⁶

Results

Descriptive statistics for the study are reported in Table 1. Alongside means and standard deviations of the variables under study, columns in the table show the results of Pearson’s

⁶ The drawbacks of measuring job satisfaction in this way are discussed elsewhere (e.g. Hubscher-Davidson 2016). Nevertheless, job satisfaction is also measured with a one item global measure in other applied psychology research studies (e.g. Muhonen and Torkelson 2004)

pairwise correlation coefficients and their p values. The rows in the table comprise the trait EI facets and factors which showed significant correlations with the TA variable at the .01 level.⁷ For a full table including all factors and facets, please refer to Appendix 3.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and t-values for the study variables

Variables	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Tolerance for Ambiguity	39.165	5.187	.296** .006	.300** .005	.284** .008	.326** .002	.336** .002	.508** .000	.045 .685
2. Trait Emotional Intelligence	4.968	.602		.729** .000	.702** .000	.608** .000	.659** .000	.525** .000	.290** .007
3. Self Control (factor)	4.651	.771			.408** .000	.870** .000	.854** .000	.478** .000	.166 .130
4. Emotion Expression (facet)	4.939	1.282				.355** .001	.332** .002	.296** .006	.293** .007
5. Emotion Regulation (facet)	4.546	.926					.712** .000	.573** .000	.091 .409
6. Stress Management (facet)	4.557	.991						.562** .000	.230* .034
7. Adaptability (facet)	4.577	.949							.185 .091
8. Job Satisfaction	5.718	1.385							

** p<.01

* p<.05

TA and EI

As can be seen in Table 1, the variables of TA and trait EI are positively and significantly correlated ($r = .296$, $p < .01$). It would therefore appear that the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the higher the tolerance of ambiguity of the translator, though it is not possible

⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, only the trait EI facets and factors showing statistically highly significant correlations will be discussed, i.e. where results show a p value at the .01 level or lower. All other results can be seen in Appendix 3.

to gauge directionality with this type of correlational study. This supports the study's Hypothesis 1. A higher level of TA was more specifically linked with higher scores on the trait EI factor of *self-control* ($r = .300, p < .01$), and the trait EI facets of *emotion expression* ($r = .284, p < .01$), *emotion regulation* ($r = .326, p < .01$), *stress management* ($r = .336, p < .01$) and *adaptability* ($r = .508, p < .01$).

TA and job satisfaction

The Pearson correlation analysis shows a very weak correlation between the variables of job satisfaction and TA ($r = .045, p = .69$). The study therefore did not reveal a linear relationship between TA and translators' levels of job satisfaction. There is therefore insufficient evidence in support of Hypothesis 2.

EI and job satisfaction

Bivariate correlations show that trait EI for these 85 translators is positively and significantly linked with self-perceived job satisfaction ($r = .290, p < .01$) thus supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding is not surprising as it mirrors the findings in Hubscher-Davidson (2016) and suggests that professional translators with high trait EI are more likely to report higher job satisfaction. Interestingly, the data also shows a link between job satisfaction and the EI facets of *emotion expression* ($r = .293, p < .01$) and *stress management* ($r = .230, p < .05$).

Discussion

Controlling ambiguity and emotions

In line with Hypothesis 1, results showed that professional translators' tolerance of ambiguity is positively linked to their trait emotional intelligence and, in particular, to the factor of *self-control*. This result is interesting for two reasons. First, as tolerating ambiguity is viewed as a measure of adaptation and healthy functioning (e.g. Furnham and Marks 2013) it makes sense to think that individuals who are tolerant of ambiguity and react adaptively to complex situations will also benefit from good emotional functioning. In fact, both TA and trait EI are considered emotional attitudes (Nicolaidis and Katsaros 2011) and the psychological literature also points towards this correlation between ambiguity tolerance and emotional intelligence: "one might conjecture that people who are high on emotional intelligence will be more likely to be attuned to emotional reactions to discrepancies that signal the need for change and will be more responsive to them" (George and Jones 2001, 439). In fact, high scorers on the *adaptability* facet of trait EI are said to positively engage with new environments, conditions and views (Petrides 2009, 59). The link between TA and the trait of *emotion expression* more specifically is also easy to understand, as the latter is defined as an ability to communicate feelings accurately and unambiguously in situations when this is necessary (Petrides 2009). As such, we can speculate that good professional translators, who are likely to be able to express themselves well due to the nature of their jobs, are also likely to be able to communicate successfully across cultures via textual means in conditions of ambiguity. Similarly to Jain et al.'s (2013) conclusions as regards managers in India, it could be argued that trait EI enhances the effectiveness of translators high in TA, and that professional translators high in TA who are comfortable making complex and uncertain decisions are even more effective when they can also make use of their emotional intelligence skills to manage ambiguity in their work. This observation is also consistent with Fraser's

argument that professional translators tend to invest emotional commitment in achieving high standards in their work (2000, 112), and the idea that affective factors (emotional engagement, self-esteem) could be related to confidence in translation and the quality of translation performance (e.g. Jaaskelainen 1996; Tirkkonen-Condit and Laukkanen 1996).

Second, the link between TA and the trait EI factor of *self-control* (and its associated facets of *emotion regulation* and *stress management*) is evocative of Shreve and Angelone's suggestion that uncertainty management and monitoring, defined in section 1, are inextricably linked (2011, 110). In the present study, the concept of *self-control* also involves monitoring and is defined as the ability to control impulses, regulate external pressures and manage stress (Petrides 2009, 61). Individuals with this kind of self-control will undoubtedly work more successfully, and Shreve and Angelone argue that professional translators who are better able to self-regulate will have developed more effective mechanisms for managing uncertainty and ambiguity in their work (2011, 110). The present study's finding that TA is significantly positively correlated with *self-control* is therefore resonant with the argument that self-monitoring and/or self-regulating is important when managing ambiguity.

Interestingly, Dewaele (2014) reports on a study by Bown (2006) who found that language learners self-regulate emotions during language learning, and that intelligent processing of emotions can have a positive impact on the challenging experience of language learning. In the same vein, it could be argued that proficient translators are able to self-regulate all kinds of emotions during translation (e.g. anxiety), and that this process of self-control or self-monitoring will positively impact on the (ambiguous) translating experience. One practical example of this can be found in Michael et al.'s 2011 study of the cognitive factors influencing L2 learners' ability to resolve ambiguity in the translation of single words. The authors found that individuals with higher working memory span were able to activate many different possible solutions, but that this activation was only useful when the individual

was able to control it and ignore task-irrelevant information. Despite the fact that only single words were used in the experiment, the study is valuable inasmuch as it underscores the importance of individual differences in processing translation-ambiguous material, and of inhibitory control.

These findings suggest the fascinating possibility that future translation process studies might examine the ways in which the different personality traits of translators interact with each other, and with various other factors (e.g. expertise), in order to help shape our understanding of this comparatively new area of research.

TA, EI and job satisfaction

The fact that professional translators' trait EI and self-perceived job satisfaction are significantly linked is in line with findings in the wider literature. Indeed, the research is very clear that trait EI is directly relevant to job satisfaction, as employees with high trait EI are better at identifying and regulating feelings of stress and frustration thus enabling them to cope better with difficult situations at work (Platsidou 2010; Ahmetoglu, Leutner and Chamorro-Premuzic 2011; Kafetsios and Zampetakis 2008).

Results, however, have not revealed a significant link between translators' tolerance of ambiguity and their self-perceived satisfaction with their job. This is a surprising finding, in light of the relatively extensive literature attesting to the positive influence that TA exerts on behaviour at work (e.g. Katsaros and Nicolaidis 2012, Katsaros, Tsirikas and Nicolaidis 2014; Katsaros et al. 2014). The result could partly be explained by the nature of the translation career itself. Even if, as demonstrated, high levels of emotional intelligence may correlate positively with translators' management of ambiguous situations in their working context, the relationship with the factor of job satisfaction may be less straightforward. For

example, one might speculate that highly successful translators who are happy in their jobs may view ambiguity and uncertainty negatively if they consider these to be a threat to the smooth running of their career or to the quality of their work.

Another possible explanation could be linked to the type of coping strategies employed. Interestingly, in their discussion of the relationship between TA and cross-cultural adjustment, Herman and Tetrick (2009) suggest that people high in TA make extensive use of problem-focused coping strategies, with positive implications for adjustment. It could therefore be mooted that translators' job satisfaction and adjustment at work depends on the type of strategies they employ to cope with - and adjust to - ambiguity in their working contexts. Although the data as regards TA and job satisfaction is inconclusive, it would be interesting to test additional professional translators to better understand the nature of the relationship between these variables.

Learning to tolerate ambiguity: some recommendations

It is perhaps interesting to note that there is an important difference in the mean TA scores between professional translators in this study ($M=39$) and multilingual individuals in Dewaele and Wei's 2013 study ($M=29$) which makes use of the same scale. Although it is not possible to make any generalisations, this is an encouraging finding for the translation profession. Referring to Ely's 1995 work, Dewaele and Wei (2013, 233) suggest that a moderate level of TA is probably optimal for second language acquisition (SLA), as learners with very low levels of TA might lack the willingness to take intelligent risks with a new language, and might be embarrassed or unhappy at linguistic uncertainty, while learners with higher levels of TA are more likely to see themselves as linguistic researchers or problem solvers. Professional translators are clearly linguistic researchers and problem solvers, so not

only is this finding consistent with current thinking on ambiguity tolerance in SLA, but it also seems to indicate that professional translators can become very proficient in what Tirkkonen-Condit (2000, 123) calls uncertainty management, or “reconciling the optimal with what is feasible”. TA has been found to increase as a consequence of intense multilingual interactions and the continued exposure to a different language and cultural environment (Dewaele and Wei 2013, 237) so this could serve to explain, at least partly, the high TA scores of professional translators.

Building upon these considerations of the relationship between TA and professional translation, I would agree with Tirkkonen-Condit (2000, 141) and Fraser (2000, 115) when they argued that tolerance of ambiguity should be further researched as it is a personality feature which plays a part in the development of good professional practice, and thus deserves attention in translator education and recruitment. Already in 2000 Fraser suggested that valuable work could be done “on the personality characteristics demonstrated by successful professional translators, with a view to designing training courses that develop and reinforce these or even, perhaps, to influencing selection criteria and procedures” (2000, 116). Sixteen years later, the concept of ambiguity tolerance is still not - to my knowledge - explicitly and consistently addressed in either translator training or recruitment contexts, in the UK at least.

I would, therefore, offer some recommendations for future training based upon this study’s findings. As the research revealed that there is a strong positive relation between professional translators’ tolerance of ambiguity and trait emotional intelligence, this suggests that trait EI may enhance performance in ambiguous situations and that TA may facilitate the resolution of complex emotional decision-making, both of which are highly relevant for translators. As argued elsewhere (Hubscher-Davidson 2013), focused training can develop translators’ trait EI levels and have real effects on behaviour modification. Students’ TA and

trait EI could be trained by taking the following steps: (1) developing translation exercises providing students with a wide range of ambiguous challenges (language, content, and situation-related), so that they acquire experience and tolerance of making ambiguous decisions; (2) regularly asking students to discuss translation briefs in groups, so that they are exposed to other perspectives and attitudes on how to handle possible ambiguous translation instructions and can identify ways to successfully proceed with their tasks without undue stress; (3) actively promoting positive feelings towards engagement in translation situations where there is ambiguity and a sense of personal responsibility, in order to develop their self-control skills.

Although personality is said to be relatively stable over time (Judge et al. 1999), it remains possible for translation educators to help students learn to develop strategies and ways of coping with ambiguity in their work. In her study of professional translators' agency in production networks, Abdallah (2010) provides a rare insight into some of the different coping strategies that translators have used when finding themselves in ambiguous, challenging and unethical situations. Translator educators could encourage students to make sense of these situations in class, in order to help them adopt positive attitudes towards their work. Ultimately, this may help to produce translation graduates that are better-adjusted and more successful in their jobs.

Limitations

The present study is not without its limitations. Similarly to Katsaros and Nicolaidis (2012), this is the first study of its kind and there are therefore no earlier studies to compare the research findings with. In addition, data was collected “at a single point in time [and] results

may be influenced by temporal, distinctive, and unique settings” (2012, 51). Indeed, the professional translators in the study came from different cultural environments, and this may have influenced their responses (although no significant differences were found in relation to the TA or trait EI of participants with different mother-tongues).

In addition, the data consisted of self-perceptions collected with self-reports, leaving the study vulnerable to the social-desirability bias. Because participating translators took the time to complete a questionnaire about ambiguity tolerance, it is likely that a positive bias towards ambiguity tolerant translators is present. Indeed, translators intolerant of ambiguity may not wish to spend time completing a questionnaire about this topic, not knowing what the results might reveal. Although the sample is relatively large compared to previous process studies, it is important to remember that it may therefore not represent the general population of translators.

Another methodological limitation of the study is linked to the relative importance of the relationship between the variables. It is important to be very careful with not exaggerating this relationship and not implying causation. Indeed, correlation coefficients in the present study do not account for a very large percent of the variability. Despite the statistical significance of some of the results discussed, I would agree with Dörnyei (2005, 24) that personality does not explain the whole picture and usually only explains a small percentage of the variance. Nonetheless, the issue is not unique to this study and R-squared values are usually low in fields that attempt to predict human behaviour, such as psychology. One can still draw valuable information from the data obtained. For example, in their study of sign language interpreters, Bontempo et al. (2014, 36) report that even carefully executed studies rarely manage to explain more than about 15% of the variance, but that personality variables are powerful modifying variables, because, when interpreted together with general mental/cognitive ability, they can help to predict an individual’s likelihood of success.

A final limitation is that the study did not include the gathering of qualitative data, and it could be argued that observing actual performance and talking to participants is the best way to understand how their attitudes affect their decision-making behaviour in translation. Nevertheless, there are clear advantages to the research design used in the present study: the large number of translators with a wide range of language combinations and coming from many different countries enhances the ecological validity of the research.

Conclusion

Experience tells us that those working as translators have a distinct set of characteristics, and there is a growing body of work that attests to the impact of soft skills on individuals' experience of working as translators. I concur with Bontempo et al. when they argue that "our findings, like most research, merely offer reinforcement for the existing intuitive beliefs of many [translation] practitioners, educators and researchers" (2014, 38). It is obvious to many that the personality of a translator can sometimes be more important than his/her language skills. Nonetheless, there are very few translation competence models or pedagogical tools that incorporate soft skills and attitudes that account for translation success. While a few studies have been conducted on the importance of personality factors in predicting success in translation amongst student translators, there is still relatively little research on professional translators' personalities.

The significance of personality in the working environment is widely acknowledged by the organizational behaviour literature. Unfortunately, this is not yet acknowledged to the same extent in the translation studies literature. Drawing on empirical research in translation and wider research in related disciplines, preliminary attempts can be made to set out a more

complete set of useful skills for translators. The idea is not to create new frameworks, but to develop existing ones so that all translators, regardless of their experience or personalities, can gain valuable insights into what makes a successful professional translator, bearing in mind that different kinds of personality traits are desirable for different kinds of jobs (Jääskeläinen 1996, 70). As for whether translators need to tolerate ambiguity to be successful, in the words of the renowned literary translator Peter Cole, “clearly it’s critical to develop a high tolerance for being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts [...] it’s also vital to move through these uncertainties and on to the hundreds and sometimes hundreds of thousands of hard decisions the translation of poetry and prose alike entails” (2013, 4).

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Appendix 1.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I avoid situations where people don't share my values. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I would like to live in a foreign country for a while. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I like to surround myself with things that are familiar to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The sooner we all acquire similar values and ideals the better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I can be comfortable with nearly all kinds of people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. If given a choice, I would visit a foreign country rather than vacation at home. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. A good teacher is one who makes you think about/consider your way of looking at things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. A good job is one where what is to be done and how it is to be done are always clear. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. A person who leads an even, regular life in which few surprises or unexpected happenings arise really has a lot to be grateful for. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. What we are used to is always preferable to what is unfamiliar. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I like parties where I know most of the people more than ones where all or most of the people are complete strangers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix 2.

Trait EI factors	Trait EI facets
Well-being	Optimism
	Happiness
	Self-esteem
Sociability	Emotional management
	Assertiveness
	Social awareness
Emotionality	Relationships
	Emotional Expression
	Emotional perception
	Empathy
Self-control	Stress management
	Impulsiveness
	Emotional regulation
Auxiliary facets*	Adaptability
	Self motivation

*Auxiliary facets are not keyed to any factor, but feed directly into the global trait EI score (Petrides 2009, 63).

Appendix 3.

Correlations between Tolerance of Ambiguity and Trait EI

Variable	Tolerance of Ambiguity (n = 85)
Self esteem	-.011
Emotion expression	.284**
Self-motivation	.090
Emotion regulation	.326**
Happiness	.144
Empathy	.238*
Social awareness	.190
Impulsivity (low)	.065
Emotion perception	.086
Stress management	.336**
Emotion management	.086
Optimism	.204
Relationships	.148
Adaptability	.508**
Assertiveness	.041
Well being	.138
Self-control	.300**
Emotionality	.239*
Sociability	.123
Global trait EI	.296**

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).